



NEWS RELEASE

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

KC MAN PLEADS GUILTY TO AIDING AND ABETTING THE MURDER OF A FEDERAL WITNESS

KANSAS CITY, Mo. – Todd P. Graves, United States Attorney for the Western District of Missouri, announced that a Kansas City, Mo., man pleaded guilty in federal court today to aiding and abetting others in the murder of a federal witness to prevent the victim from communicating the illegal acts of his co-defendant to law enforcement.

Cornelius Peoples, 30, of Kansas City, also known as "C," pleaded guilty before U.S. District Judge Fernando J. Gaitan, Jr., this afternoon to aiding and abetting others in the killing of John Wayne Hogsett, also known as Jovan Ross, with the intent to prevent Hogsett/Ross from communicating to law enforcement information regarding the armed robbery of a credit union. Hogsett/Ross was murdered in the early morning hours of June 8, 1998, at his Kansas City residence.

Peoples is one of two defendants named in the indictment. **Xavier Lightfoot**, 41, of Kansas City, also was named in a second superseding indictment that was returned by a federal grand jury on May 19, 2004, in Kansas City.

By pleading guilty, **Peoples** admitted that **Lightfoot** was arrested and charged in the District of Nebraska with committing several credit union robberies. During **Lightfoot's** prosecution in Nebraska, **Peoples** learned that Hogsett/Ross was the chief government witness in the case. In an attempt to avoid having **Lightfoot** prosecuted for the credit union robberies, **Peoples** admitted that a scheme was devised to kill Hogsett/Ross. **Peoples** admitted that he and **Lightfoot** communicated the details of the scheme over a period of days during in-person visits at the Corrections Corporation of America, a federal holding facility. A number of the meetings occurred with a telephone being used to conduct the conversation. The telephone conversations were recorded, Graves said.

Peoples admitted that a decision was made to hire someone to murder Hogsett/Ross.

Consequently, **Peoples** approached Anthony Lee Hunter to commit the murder. Hunter indicated that he was currently under police scrutiny for various illegal activities and could not commit the murder himself. However, **Peoples** admitted that Hunter offered to find another person to murder Hogsett/Ross. Hunter then contracted Curtis Barfield and Carl Haskell to commit the murder. Preparations were undertaken to commit the murder, including driving the hired killers by Hogsett/Ross' residence and place of employment.

Hogsett/Ross was murdered as a result of those agreements on June 8, 1998. After the murder, **Peoples** had several conversations with Hunter in an effort to confirm that Hogsett/Ross was dead. Confirmation of the murder became critical because the murder was never announced publicly. **Peoples** eventually met with the contracted killers and obtained details of what transpired. **Peoples** gave Hunter approximately \$2,500 of the agreed-upon contract fee. Shortly after, **Peoples** told **Lightfoot** in a recorded conversation that the murder had occurred.

In separate but related cases, Haskell, Barfield and Hunter all were convicted of crimes relating to the murder of Hogsett/Ross. A federal jury convicted Haskell of the murder of a federal witness and Barfield of conspiracy to murder a federal witness on June 12, 2002. On June 1, 2000, Hunter pled guilty to aiding and abetting others in the murder of a federal witness.

This case is being prosecuted by Assistant U.S. Attorneys K. Michael Warner and Jeff Valenti. It was investigated by the Federal Bureau of Investigation and the Kansas City, Mo., Kansas City, Kan., Omaha, Neb., St. Joseph, Mo., Overland Park, Kan., and Leawood, Kan., police departments.

This news release, as well as additional information about the office of the United States Attorney for the Western District of Missouri, is available on-line at

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